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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6518
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2896
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 9064
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2540
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7393
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6531
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1740
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0724
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0484
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 001145

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: FRUSTRATED HARRAGA PARENTS ARRESTED

REF: ALGIERS 787

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton;
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: A demonstration outside the Tunisian consulate in Annaba led by parents of youths who disappeared while trying to flee Algeria in boats ("harraga"; reftel) turned violent on October 20. Police arrested 14 of the protesters and charged three with violating the laws controlling public gatherings; they now face up to three years in prison and a 50,000 dinar (USD 820) fine. The parents, who formed an informal NGO over a year ago, have yet to receive a reply from the interior ministry to their formal request for legal status. The demonstration began as a meeting on the beach of Sidi Salem, a suburb of Annaba from which many harraga launch their boats hoping to reach Europe, and then proceeded into the center of town to the consulate. Along the way, the number of demonstrators grew to include scores of disenfranchised youth. By the time the group reached the Tunisian consulate it consisted of a rowdy mix of over 100 people, some of whom broke windows and looted shops in the area. The harraga parents are frustrated at the lack of information they have received from the Algerian and Tunisian governments about the fate of their children, especially after learning that several boats recently detained by Tunisian authorities in Bizerte had been identified as Algerian. END SUMMARY.

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

12. (C) According to Kamel Belabed, one of the organization's leaders whose son disappeared in the spring of 2007, the day began with 15-20 parents gathering on the beach, as they have no authorized meeting place of their own. Kamel Daoud, director of the local Center for the Defense of Human Rights (CDDH), told us on October 22 that news that several boats in Bizerte, Tunisia, had been identified as Algerian harraga boats prompted the meeting, as the parents wanted to strategize about how to lobby the Tunisian government for information on the passengers. Daoud told us that some of the parents had been told by Tunisian locals that the authorities had picked up live passengers in the boats, but had no idea what happened to them next. As reported in reftel, the families of the harraga believe that many harraga either perish at sea or languish in Tunisian and other regional prisons, part of a shared regional government approach to criminalize the harraga in the absence of any other coordinated attempt to address the causes of the harraga phenomenon. Belabed reiterated that when harraga

arrive in Spain or Italy they always call home, leaving silence as the only evidence of the disappeared.

¶3. (C) Daoud told us that the parents on the beach decided to proceed to the Tunisian consulate in an effort to pressure the Tunisians for more information about Algerian harraga they believe have been detained in Tunisian jails without identity papers or proper sentencing. The intent, Daoud said, was for a peaceful protest. Along the way, however, "angry young men" caught wind of the demonstration and joined the group, becoming violent, damaging property and looting shops. Daoud believed that the police responded to the violence rather than to the parents of the harraga association per se. The Algerian League for the Defense of Human Rights (LADDH) issued a press statement on October 21 condemning the detentions and saying that instead of criminalizing those associated with the harraga phenomenon, the Algerian state should "urgently treat the root social, political and economic causes of the problem." The LADDH also urged the government to work with Tunisia to share and publicize information on dead and detained harraga.

COMMENT: CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION

¶4. (C) The current situation of the harraga parents in Annaba is a reflection of both the continuing restrictions on freedom of association and the incapacity of the government to address the harraga phenomenon by any means other than criminalizing it. While police anywhere can be expected to act when demonstrations turn violent, the ongoing detention

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of the Annaba harraga parents highlights the fact that their NGO has been granted no legal status and therefore was left with no meeting space other than the beach. As we reported reftel, the parents have lobbied the Algerian and Tunisian governments extensively for information. According to Belabed, they have not received any reply to date. As Daoud said, the harraga phenomenon continues to paralyze the government. At a loss for a more "creative" solution, it simply does not know what to do and "reflexively criminalizes the harraga" and those associated with them.
DAUGHTON